Why French-Canadians Won't Fight For Canada

Million and a half of them in the United States proud to fight for Uncle Sam:: Those in the Dominion show ancient hate for England, once their conquerer

IN THE United States a million and a half French-Canadians are proud to make war for Uncle Sam. Those in Canada have refused to volunteer for service and have fought conscription dangerously and fiercely. They declare that fighting for Canada is fighting for England, once their conqueror. Why all the rumpus? We present here an analysis of the situation by Yvonne LeMaitre, a French-Canadian. Her article is taken from the Boston Transcript, and says in part:

The one great striking fact about the behavior of the French-Canadians on the Yankee side of the line—or French-Americans, as they want to be called—is the contrast with the attitude of their Quebec cousins. Their response to the call has been splendid. According to recruiting officers, they and the Italians are the two racial groups which have furnished the largest proportion of volunteers in New England. And since the coming of the draft, not only have they been promptly and patriotically acquiescent to the nation's demand, but have filed fewer exemption claims, again according to official report from the stations, than any other element in the population of foreign stock.

Aside from this patriotic American war spirit, their sympathy and affectionate regard for France is lively; there is scant friendship for Britain, and interest in Canadian affairs is keen among the older people and practically absent among the younger.

Lowell, with its population of some 28,000 people of French name and race, is a shining spot for the study of this "triple patriotism"—if one may dare the term—involving a race twice transplanted and as often de-nationalized and re-nationalized.

The natives of France in Lowell are few, and chiefly represented by priests in charge of the largest French Catholic parish in the city and by members of a religious brotherhood, the Marists, in charge of the boys' parochial school in the same parish. Several of these Marists are at the front, having at once responded when the call came from France early in the war. One was killed on his first day under fire. So this calm home of a French Catholic brotherhood in Lowell, surrounded by a delightful garden, with a charming view on the Merrimac, is a spot where the war is very much of a reality and every mail from France an event.

Lowell's French-Canadian stock, like all others submitted to Uncle Sam's alchemy, varies greatly in degrees of American assimilation. It has the two extremes, of complete assimilation and utter "hyphenation," and all the shades between. By the newspapers they read ye shall know them! Lowell has a large enough contingent of the older French-Canadians who subscribe to La Presse and La Patrie of Montreal and to Le Devoir, Bourassa's organ, and to whom Canada is still very near; they are the ones interested in the conscription quarrel in the Dominion. It has a much larger number who read only American papers, young people born in "les Etats" and who insist that they are Americans first, last and all the time—that species of eagle-spreading adopted son which Uncle knows how and likes to turn out, "plus royaliste que le roi," more Catholic than the pope and more American than the Father of His Country. It has taken the French-Canadian stock longer to evolve this type, perhaps, than it has taken the Irish stock, probably because of the difference in languages and a greater attachment of the French-Canadians to their own schools. But there is no questioning the fact that it has very much arrived, and is bound to be an ever-energizing factor in the political advancement and general material progress of the race in New England.

The American end of the war comes home vividly to New England's French-Canadians because of the extraordinary fecundity of the race, in which respect they differ so markedly from their "cousins de France." The proportion of young men of military age among them is strikingly large because their families are so prolific. One Lowell family alone had five conscripts—not one of whom, by the way, claimed exemption—five brothers, aged twenty-one, twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-seven and twenty-nine years, respectively. Another family had four sons of draft age, and six others had three apiece—eight French-American families, in brief, furnishing the amazing number of 27 conscripts.

Young French-American men in Lowell—home, by the way, of George Charette, one of the "heroes of the Merrimac" of Spanish war fame—had always in peace times enlisted to a noticeable extent in the regular army and navy and in the national guard. As one officer of the latter organization put it: "The French boys always were strong for the national guard." Upon the call to arms, the response of these same "French boys" was striking. In spite of the circumstances of so many of them, forcing abstention because of dependents to support, volunteering was brisk with them in all branches of the service. When the draft came into operation, Military District Number 4, corresponding to Ward 6, Lowell's banner "French ward," had only 68 men to call to fill its quota, so numerous had been the voluntary enlistments, or "credits," in the section.

A recruiting officer in Lowell, who had been previously stationed in several other New England cities, showed me a page of his register where 15 of the 30 volunteers' names it contained were French, and he reported a similar willingness of the "French boys" to serve wherever he had been. This page was of course exceptional, but no page in the book was without several French names. They ranged all the way from that of a prosperous young lawyer to that of a woodchopper who phonetically signed "Arment," the named he shared with the lover of the Dame aux Camelias.

The five Lowell units of the national guard went into camp with one-fourth or over of their men French-Americans, while many more, according to an officer, had at some time tried to join and been "turned down" for various reasons. One company of the railroad engineers' reserve, numbering 160 men now in France engaged in railroad building, was organized and is captained by a Lowell French-Canadian, who naturally sought among his compatriots for volunteers and secured the larger part of them from their ranks. A company of the state guard in Lowell is composed to a man of "French boys" and captained by one, these same "French boys" being older men with dependents who could not otherwise serve, but who are all patriotically anxious to give what they can. Plattsburg commissions have also been sought and secured.

Patriotism has been shown in various other ways. A French-American group of the Red Cross has been formed, and knitting is fast and furious among the French girls. Priests in the French churches have preached volunteering. Earlier in the war one young priest stirred social gatherings at the Association Catholique, the largest organization of French-American men in the city, by passionate appeals for voluntary service under the American colors. That organization alone has over 60 volunteers now wearing khaki or the sailor's blue.

In brief, all reports tend to show that the one million and a half people of French-Canadian stock in the United States are gladly and even eagerly accepting war service, while two million of the same people in Canada are apparently opposing it "en bloc." What can be the reason for this striking difference of attitude?

The English colonies in 1776 became American of their own volition. The French of Canada became English in 1763 by force of conquest. England to the American colonials was the burden shaken off; France, to the Canadian colonials, the lost treasure.

"There is no logic," a young American once said to me, "about the French-Canadian affection for France and the corresponding dislike of England—one born of the other—after a century and a half of English rule. It is mere sentiment. Political, that is, practically, France's name is erased from the Canadian consciousness."

The sentimental link with France has naturally remained stronger with the educated classes. It always does. The cultured lose more in losing the ancestral land because they had possessed more of that land's heritage.

This is what has puzzled Americans so much—the contradiction in the Quebec Frenchman's refusal to serve when he is described as still fond of France. This contradiction, however, is not wholly contradictory. The ancient French blood bond, the occult and mighty pact of race, is still the obscure root of many things, and it cannot be ignored in "getting at" the complex feeling of French-Americans on the attitude of their Quebec cousins in the war—an Ariadne's web made up of both condemnation and approval of the Quebec reluctance to serve.

Willing as they have shown themselves to help Uncle Sam make "the world safe for democracy," in general they do not condemn their Canadian kin-folk, and commentary almost invariably opens with a condoning: "Oh, well, in Canada, it isn't the same thing."

Why? Not all of the "French boys" who have gone gladly into the American ranks can clarify their feeling into so many words, but the secret of it is certainly this: as American citizens and soldiers of the United States, they feel part of a proud sovereign nation "making" war; Canada, on the contrary, is only "participating" in the war, and the Quebec cousin, if he fights, only "fights for England."

In certain French-Canadian minds hostility to anything English in itself is natural. And this hostility is precisely corollary to the attachment for France, vanquished by England on Canadian soil a century and a half ago, and such as have it will not fight for England at any price, even with France involved in the quarrel as it is today. It is sentiment, "reasons that reason does not know," and an Irishman understands just what it means.

Add to this fundamental hostility to Britain which is of the blood, the bitterness of the bilingual war between the French and English factions in Canada, the multiplying grievances of Jean Baptiste in regard to the relegating of French to the rank of an "accomplishment" in the Manitoba and Ontario schools, the rumbles of that "guerre de races" he hears of with every visit of a relative from the North, and the New England cousin of Jean Baptiste is apt enough to exclaim: "They have reason in Quebec! To hell with helping the English in the war!"

Besides the merely sentimental, there are the "thoughtful" sympathizers for Quebec, keener students of the question. In these same people there is no dream of resisting the draft here, it is even approved of as the wisest war measure President Wilson could take to have imposed it at once without asking the people to vote on it. But with one voice they say that in Canada "ce n'est pas la meme chose" and that to impose conscription on a little country of 7,000,000 inhabitants which has already volunteered 400,000 soldiers is tyranny. Note here the subtle difference in the "sense of country" and the "sense of colony," as it were. French-Americans here feel that they are fighting "for their country" and the draft is just. Canadians in their eyes are colonials who are "helping," who have first of all the right to decide whether they will do it or not.

L'Etoile, the Lowell French paper, has taken an emphatic stand against conscription in Canada; also against the recruiting of New England French Canadians for Canada's forces. Canadian recruiting officers recently on tour in New England have been the butt of acerb aspersions from that quarter. "Serve the great cause under the Stars and Stripes," reiterates the editor, "don't go to Canada to serve by the side of English francophobes and fanatics." This attitude has been characteristic of the French-American press of New England, consisting of some 10 or 12 sheets distributed among the larger textile centers, with but an exception or two. It has patriotically "rooted" for volunteer service under the American colors on the part of French-Americans, and in the same breath defended the Quebec French who refused to enlist under the British colors.

In the bilingual quarrel the French-American press naturally sided with the French element, contending that its rights were trampled upon, and the present hostility to English efforts in Canada is a resultant.

By these extremists the big word annexation is pronounced. "Would not Canada be much better off if it were American?" they ask.

At the other end of the bridge are found those who bitterly denounce the Quebec cousins as traitors, rebels, cowards, etc., and have not enough words to paint them black. "What!" exclaimed one fervid citizen, "before the war didn't that Nationalist crew and other 'patriots' sing La Marseillaise with tears in their eyes? And didn't they clamor 'Restons Francais!' on every roof? Their very salvation, and that of Canada itself, demanded that they should carefully keep their skirts from the contaminating English, and above all remain themselves, remain French. And now that France is clutched by the throat, their refrain has suddenly changed to 'We are Canadians, neither Frenchmen nor Englishmen! This war is none of our affair!' I must say that these people pass my comprehension.—Boston Transcript

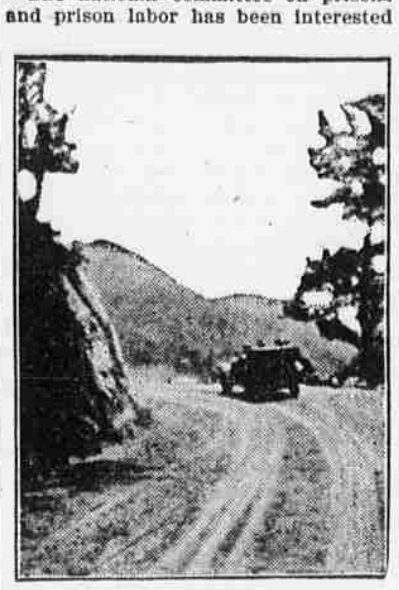
FOR BETTER ROADS

PUT CONVICTS ON HIGHWAYS

More Prisoners to Be Worked on Public Roads This Year Than Ever Done Before.

More prisoners will be worked on the road this year than ever before. Impetus has been given to the movement for convict road work through the publication by the United States department of agriculture of a bulletin, "Convict Labor for Road Work."

The national committee on prisons and prison labor has been interested



Good Road in North Carolina.

to note that the principles emphasized in this report as essential to the success of convict road work are the same as those the committee has considered imperative. These principles are that when county convicts are to be employed on the roads they should be turned over to the state convict road force, all convict road work being under state control.

The second principle is that there should be co-ordination between the state prison and the state highway departments in regard to convict road work. The prison department should select the prisoners for this work, and make all rules regarding their care and discipline. This department should also supervise the carrying out of these rules. The highway department should have full charge of all road operations, and be responsible for carrying out the rules and regulations made by the prison department.

The report takes up in detail the selection of camp officers, and the keeping of records and accounts, including suggestions for order slips and vouchers.

Other features of the report which will be specially valuable to authorities carrying on convict road work deal with the location of a camp site, water supply, camp sanitation, quarters and structures, health conditions and care of the sick and injured, clothing and rations. All are discussed scientifically and practical suggestions are made which can be followed out in any part of the country.

The department of agriculture has rendered service to prison and road authorities, while private citizens have now available standards by which to judge the convict camps in their vicinity. The year 1917 should be a record one for convict road work if local authorities use to good advantage the assistance afforded them by the department of agriculture through the office of public roads and rural engineering.

IMMENSE COST OF BAD ROADS

Farmers Allow $300,000,000 to Escape Each Year Because of Poor and Unimproved Highways.

The farmers of the United States have been allowed $300,000,000 in real money to escape from their pockets each year because of poor roads, according to the testimony of experts who made a survey of the effect of bad roads upon markets for the department of agriculture. Just when the farmer has the opportunity to market his crops at top prices, bad weather closes the roads to heavy hauling and he must wait until another season. To the loss of the farmers must be added an economic loss equally large suffered by the nation. If the rural roads could be used for traffic the year round, Uncle Sam would save more than half a billion dollars. This is a typical bad-road blockade which exists for weeks and often months in rural district.—Scientific American.

His Own.

"The crown prince does not seem to have accomplished anything."

"Oh, yes he has. The crown prince has kept it from being cracked."

There are times when it is advisable to listen to a fool's advice.